

A Portfolio Evaluation of Implementation and Outcomes for United Way for Southeastern Michigan's 2011 Social Innovation Fund Project

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All evaluation findings are preliminary and pending review by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

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Executive Summary

The Detroit-area 2011 Social Innovation Fund project (SIF 2011) was a remarkable initiative that brought together highly invested partners who shared a common purpose: to increase the number of young children prepared to enter school (i.e., ready to learn), with a particular emphasis on promoting early literacy. With leadership, coordination, and funding provided by the United Way for Southeastern Michigan (UWSEM), SIF 2011 broke new ground at multiple levels, starting with the nature of federal requirements and assistance, and extending to the local level with untested financing models, rigorous data collection and evaluation components, new avenues for cooperation, consistently high expectations, and hopes for positive outcomes.

SIF 2011, managed federally by the Corporation for National & Community Service, sought to strengthen the use of evidence in social-change interventions, while also encouraging innovative practice models.¹ UWSEM was among the 2011 cohort of “intermediary” organizations awarded a multi-year SIF grant. Consistent with the terms of the grant, UWSEM made sub-awards to local programs (subgrantees). Each subgrantee contracted with an independent evaluator and developed subgrantee evaluation plans (SEPs), designed to yield at least “moderate” evidence (according to well-accepted scientific standards) of the effectiveness of their selected intervention(s).

This report was prepared by Child Trends to evaluate, **at a portfolio level** (that is, across all subgrantees), the five-year implementation of the Detroit-area SIF 2011 initiative, and its outcomes. The report complements the independent evaluations contracted for by each SIF subgrantee—the programs responsible for providing services and carrying out other activities associated with the project.

An implementation evaluation, such as the one described here, is critical for understanding the outcomes achieved by subgrantees and participants. For example, why were some outcomes achieved but not others? Why were some participants more successful than others? What changes occurred over the life of the intervention that may have accounted for the degree of its success? What specific challenges were encountered in implementing the intervention, and what knowledge and capacities were gained among those implementing it? These are a sampling of the kinds of information that can emerge from evaluation activities.

An outcomes evaluation, in contrast, focuses on the bottom line: was anyone better off because of their participation in one or more intervention activities? A well-designed evaluation of outcomes must minimize the possibility that the results obtained reflect factors outside the intervention activities—other influences that could account for the results. A portfolio-level outcomes evaluation must further wrestle with the challenge of summarizing results *across* multiple programs, each of which may have used different outcome measures.

Implementation evaluation

As described in the full report, our portfolio implementation evaluation, which relied on extensive interviews conducted over the course of the initiative, surfaced several **key themes**:

- **Participation in SIF 2011 helped build important organizational capacity.** All five subgrantees that comprised the initiative as of June 2017—and UWSEM itself—greatly developed their organizational capacities, particularly for data management and evaluation. These skills give organizations a sound basis from which to sustain their

activities. In addition, the development of these capacities at UWSEM was likely instrumental in obtaining a 2016 SIF grant.

- **UWSEM modeled valuable self-reflection that influenced subgrantees' growth and learning.** Organizational changes within UWSEM, driven by a recognition of its own needs for additional capacity, created both a model and a space to encourage subgrantees to pursue opportunities that would benefit them long-term. At the subgrantee level, strong leadership and willingness to take risks often made the difference between maintaining the status quo and evolving as an organization.
- **Participant recruitment and retention were among the challenges shared by subgrantees.** Additional challenges included barriers associated with language and literacy in target populations, and the requirement to raise matching funds.
- **The initiative supported production of a series of books documenting important aspects of each subgrantee's program activities, providing a record of their efforts.** While reactions to these books were mixed, pride in the accomplishments they represented was dominant.
- **Progress was made on the goals of sustainability and scaling.** All but one subgrantee is planning to continue offering SIF-funded programs after this grant expires, and several have specific expansions in mind.

The Child Trends' implementation evaluation team offers the following **recommendations:**

- **Balance quantity and quality.** To maximize chances for success, careful consideration should be given to the number of programs that an intermediary organization can adequately support under an initiative such as SIF 2011. Among the factors that must be considered

are the resources available—both at the community level (e.g., availability of match funds from community sources) and at the intermediary level (e.g., staffing and amount of funds per subgrantee). An assessment of a subgrantee’s capacity (e.g., for fundraising, data management, and evaluation), and the investment of its leadership in scaling and replication should guide this process. Subgrantees may require different levels of intermediary support at different phases of the project, depending on their capacities relevant to that particular phase, and their leadership’s investment in the SIF-funded program.

- **Emphasize to external audiences, including potential funders, the collaborative nature of this type of project.** Community partners (e.g., funders, schools hosting a program) need to be made aware that their contributions support a broad-based, collaborative initiative—not simply a single program.
- **Plan early.** Planning for sustainability, replication, and scaling should start at the outset of this kind of initiative.

Outcomes evaluation

The full report describes the complementary approaches used in our portfolio outcomes evaluation: one conceptual and the other quantitative. **The conceptual approach** relies on analyzing an intervention’s theory of change, assessing its strength against findings in the research literature, and articulating the intervention’s role as a contributor to the outcomes identified in the theory of change. We find that the mix of strategies represented by the SIF 2011 subgrantees is consistent with a plausible, evidence-informed theory of change.

The quantitative approach relies on an innovative methodology—individual minimum detectable effect (IMDE)—to summarize participant

outcomes across disparate measures and programs. The framework for this analysis begins with a consensus achieved among subgrantees related to the common outcomes and associated indicators that would be used in the portfolio evaluation. Agreement on these not only provided a shared language with which to communicate across the partners, but a basis for the methodology used to analyze their outcomes data.

The three shared outcomes under the Common Outcomes, Common Indicators (COCI) analysis were as follows:

- *Children are Ready to Learn*
- *Parents and Caregivers Nurture Children's Development*
- *Communities Promote Children's Well-Being*

To further understand and quantify the progress made toward these outcomes over time, the five subgrantees also identified specific, measurable *indicators* for each outcome. For example, under the first outcome, *Children are Ready to Learn*, there were two indicators:

- Percentage of children who are ready for kindergarten
- Percentage of children who are developing typically across multiple domains (including physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, communication skills, and general knowledge)

There is no national consensus on school readiness norms, let alone on a single instrument to be used for this assessment.² The IMDE approach met this challenge by focusing on individual-level progress over time (regardless of measure), relative to other program participants receiving the same assessment.

The COCI approach (along with the IMDE analysis) has several advantages:

- It does not require collection of new data beyond that which programs had already provided for their independent evaluations.
- It does not replace those evaluations, but complements them.
- It does not make inappropriate comparisons among programs, but provides information of value to each program.
- It enables analysis, not only of participants who made meaningful progress, but those who did not, including participants already performing at high levels at baseline.

Findings

Our portfolio analysis found that, across programs, **more than half of participants (57 percent) made meaningful progress over a program year** on one or more measures of kindergarten readiness. Among the five subgrantees, this success rate varied between 53 and 61 percent.

On one or more measures of the second outcome, *Parents and Caregivers Nurture Children's Development*, three programs had data appropriate to the COCI analysis. In aggregate, **62 percent of participants made meaningful improvement** on this outcome.

These results compare favorably with published effect sizes associated with several well-regarded home visiting and early childhood education interventions. They are consistent, as well, with many preliminary findings from the independent subgrantee evaluations.

Although the IMDE approach has its own limitations, we believe it holds promise for application to situations where community coalition partners working toward broadly shared aims—but unable to use a common

assessment instrument—need a credible approach to summarizing collective impact.

Finally, the findings of this evaluation of the SIF 2011 initiative provide encouraging evidence of portfolio-level success, and underscore the value and the challenges associated with multi-pronged community-based initiatives.

A Portfolio Evaluation of Implementation and Outcomes for United Way for Southeastern Michigan's 2011 Social Innovation Fund Project

Introduction

Over the past six years, an innovative project in the Detroit area has adopted cutting-edge ideas to boost families' and communities' support for children's early learning.

Our society has become increasingly aware that the earliest years in childhood are critical for brain development and for the sensitive interactions with caring adults that promote a child's learning.³ It is also apparent that achievement gaps—by race/ethnicity, income, and neighborhood—begin in early childhood.⁴ Left unaddressed, these are likely to widen over a child's school career, threatening not only their academic opportunities but their prospects for economic security, health, and overall well-being.⁵

To interrupt long-standing, intergenerational cycles of low education, poverty, and toxic stress, many experts believe that two-generation approaches—simultaneously addressing the needs of young children and their parents—are required.⁶ Moreover, there is wide agreement that single programs are less effective in tackling complex community problems relative to the combined efforts of multiple stakeholders drawing on diverse assets, including knowledge of “what works” (evidence-informed practices).⁷

Society is also becoming more diverse, particularly as we continue with the challenges associated with integrating immigrants. Immigrants—and their children (most of whom are U.S. citizens)—will account for a growing share of tomorrow's labor force, so we can ill afford to have them poorly prepared for the competitive, highly skilled jobs of the future.⁸

The Detroit-area initiative is an important case-study that informs the emerging landscape of locally designed, place-sensitive activities organized for cumulative results and collective accountability. The initiative

- Focused on children’s early learning (especially their literacy)
- Featured programs that mainly incorporate two-generation (parent-and-child) models
- Had target populations that exemplify the multicultural communities that are increasingly typical of our country

The United Way for Southeastern Michigan (UWSEM) was among the awardees in the 2011 round of Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grants from the Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS). The SIF embodied several overarching objectives:⁹

- Support innovative solutions with the potential to replace ineffective responses to stubborn social problems
- Elevate the use of evidence by providing funding and technical assistance for independent, rigorous evaluations with the potential to identify effective and promising practices
- Select experienced grantees (“intermediaries”) with the skills to select, through a competitive process, high-performing programs (“subgrantees”) that are ready to participate in a robust evaluation effort
- Field an innovative funding model, which requires that both intermediary organizations and subgrantees provide a one-to-one match with federal dollars
- Support a learning community that embraces knowledge-sharing, facilitates replication and taking to scale of successful programs and practices, and provides for the sustainability of these strategies

Child Trends worked with UWSEM to conduct a portfolio evaluation of its SIF project. The portfolio evaluation includes two main components: an outcomes evaluation and an implementation evaluation. To date, Child Trends has completed five interim reports summarizing implementation findings, each of which provided insight into the initiative's progress at a particular point in time.

This final, portfolio-level report first presents information about the broader context within which the SIF project was implemented, followed by a description of the project partners (subgrantees). Implementation evaluation findings are reported next. Findings are primarily based on data collected during the final site visit. They focus on: 1) the ways in which subgrantees' practices were shaped by the initiative; 2) the extent to which subgrantees were able to use the initiative as a catalyst for growth; 3) the challenges that persisted across time; and 4) the knowledge-sharing, sustainability, and scale-up efforts led by UWSEM in the latter part of the initiative.

Following the implementation discussion, the report moves to the portfolio outcomes evaluation, beginning with a summary of some evaluation challenges typical of initiatives like this. We then describe two approaches—one conceptual and one quantitative—used to assess the contributions of these collective efforts to the common outcomes. We note the results obtained by the SIF initiative in the context of those obtained in evaluations of programs providing similar interventions. We finish with some reflections on the limitations of, and future directions for, this work.

Background

UWSEM's Greater Detroit Early Childhood Innovation Fund (SIF) initiative brings together five^a established community-based organizations that have committed themselves to achieving three shared outcomes:

- *Children are Ready to Learn*
- *Parents and Caregivers Nurture Children's Development*
- *Communities Promote Children's Well-Being*

To further understand and quantify the progress made toward these outcomes over time, the five subgrantees also identified specific, measurable indicators for each outcome. For example, under the first outcome, *Children are Ready to Learn*, there are two indicators:

- Percentage of children who are ready for kindergarten
- Percentage of children who are developing typically across multiple domains (including physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, communication skills, and general knowledge)

This approach was named the Common Outcomes, Common Indicators (COCI) framework.

Context Surrounding SIF 2011 Implementation

Neither the evaluations or their findings take place in a vacuum, but they are affected by multiple factors that are, strictly speaking, outside of their parameters. Nevertheless, an understanding of these conditions provides essential context for a fuller appreciation of the results of an initiative like the SIF. The political, economic, and social "ecology" in which the SIF took

^a Eleven subgrantees were initially part of the project.

place likely influenced both its implementation and its results. We can suggest only a few of those factors here.

The Detroit metro area is making a determined comeback following decades of economic challenge. The renewal is still in progress and owes much to the resilience and dedication of residents, to generous philanthropy, and to the efforts of hundreds of grassroots nonprofit organizations—among which UWSEM is a leader.

Notwithstanding these remarkable contributions, the Detroit region and UWSEM were hard-hit by the Great Recession that began in 2008. Thus, opportunities like the SIF grants (inaugurated in 2010) attracted the organization's keen interest. UWSEM's leadership was additionally attracted to the SIF model because it appeared to align with a new mission emphasizing social change—something that UWSEM was beginning to embrace. UWSEM's 2010 bid was unsuccessful, but the organization significantly retooled to secure 2011 funding. In retrospect, UWSEM believes that the SIF model fell short of delivering the funding opportunity as understood by either UWSEM or the model creators.

Another feature of the local environment was competing views around organizational priorities. In an all-too-common scenario, the early-childhood focus of the 2011 SIF grant ran up against some of UWSEM's other strategic areas, making it difficult for the SIF activities to gain internal traction.

As one of the relatively early recipients of a SIF grant, UWSEM was among the grantees that endured the "growing pains" of CNCS, reflected in numerous revisions—still ongoing after the grant award—of its policies, procedures, and expectations. This confusing guidance hampered the review and selection process of UWSEM's subgrantees. For example, UWSEM interpreted literally the SIF tenet favoring innovation, and intentionally

selected some subgrantees that were less-experienced and thus for which program sustainability was more of a risk. If UWSEM had benefited from current CNCS guidance around subgrantee selection, it would not have selected some of the original partners. Consequently, until CNCS guidance was finalized (and after selection had occurred), UWSEM could not know that several subgrantees were facing challenges (particularly around the financial, evaluation, and other compliance requirements of the project) that would threaten their successful participation.

The match-funding requirement for subgrantees was also an implementation challenge. UWSEM subgrants ranged from \$100,000 to \$350,000 and subgrantees were expected to match the full amount. In the absence of a coordinated approach, subgrantees were in competition not only with each other to raise funds from local foundations, but also with UWSEM. UWSEM had already made an initial overture to many foundations without a coordinated approach to secure local resources and relationships. As a result, many local foundations and other funders did not support subgrantees, because their belief was they were already funding the SIF initiative through support to UWSEM.

Implementation Evaluation

Subgrantee Organizations

The subgrantees and their SIF-funded program activities are briefly described below:

Table 1. *Overview of Subgrantees’ SIF Programs.*

Subgrantee	Program Overview
ACCESS	<p><i>ACCESS’</i> SIF-funded program serves a relatively small population of families in southwest Detroit who are primarily Yemeni (Arabic-speaking), and some Hispanic families. Their activities are offered over two semesters to three annual cohorts of approximately 80 families (282 children and their families from inception through August 2017), and have four components: a parent-and-child-literacy program, an effective-parenting curriculum, English as a Second Language instruction, and case management. Program funding (through October 2017) is \$1.6 million. There was no specific dosage requirement provided, but dosage measures are included in the evaluation plan. The most intensive part of the program is the Parent and Child Interactive Literacy (PCIL) program, which is offered twice a week.</p>
Living Arts	<p><i>Living Arts</i> offers an arts-infused early learning model that targets preschool teachers through residency programs, and parents through workshops that encourage them to apply the techniques at home with children. Each year, Living Arts staff work with more than 130 teachers in 69 Early Head Start, Head Start (pre-K), and kindergarten classrooms in Detroit and Hamtramck. More than 4,067 children have been served from inception through August 2017. Program funding (through October 2017) is \$716,000. There are 16 arts-infused literacy lessons offered. In addition, there are two teacher “train the trainer” workshops provided each year, along with one parent workshop. There are not any specific dosage requirements.</p>

<p>Macomb Collaborative (MC)</p>	<p>The <i>Macomb Collaborative</i>, through its <i>Ready Children Ready Communities</i> initiative (a collaborative of Leaps and Bounds and Macomb Family Services), offers home visits, child screenings and assessments, a project therapist (along with referrals for more intensive mental health services for children and families), Play and Learn Groups for parents and preschoolers, and community events. The collaborative has served more than 929 children and their families in South Warren and Detroit through its different initiatives, which include Macomb Family Services and Leaps and Bounds Family Services as partners. The Macomb Intermediate School District was also a partner through the first five years of the initiative. Program funding (through October 2017) is \$801,000. The initiative requires a minimum participation in four play-and-learn groups, or five Parents as Teachers home visits.</p>
<p>National Kidney Foundation of Michigan (NKFM)</p>	<p>The <i>National Kidney Foundation of Michigan (NKFM)</i>, through its <i>Programs for Early Childhood Health</i>, offers a nutrition and physical education curriculum (Regie’s Rainbow Adventure, or RRA¹⁰) to early childhood (Head Start) programs, a self-administered program assessment that focuses on nutrition- and physical activity-related policies and practices (Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care), and a lay health educator program for parents and other caregivers (Healthy Families Start with You). They have served nearly 14,201 children across the Detroit metro area. Program funding (through October 2017) is \$2.0 million. The program requires at least seven sessions of RRA.</p>
<p>Southwest Counseling Solutions (SWSOL)</p>	<p><i>Southwest Counseling Solutions</i> provides family literacy programs for English language learners, including adult English education, interactive parent-child literacy activities, and parenting training. Each year, the program serves about 100 families (382 children from inception through August 2017), primarily Hispanic families in southwest Detroit. Program funding (through October 2017) is \$833,000. Full participation requires 150 hours of parent involvement, which is about 11 hours per week over 24 weeks. To be counted in the evaluation, participants need to attend at least 60 percent of the program activities.</p>

The five subgrantees all focus on school readiness and serve children in a diverse variety of settings, which include enrichment programs and home visiting initiatives.

Methods

In six in-person visits over four years, plus additional telephone interviews, Child Trends evaluators collected ground-level information on the progress of SIF implementation, using qualitative approaches. During a final site visit in June 2017, Child Trends staff conducted in-person interviews with staff across the five subgrantees remaining in the SIF Initiative (see Table 1), with staff at the Detroit office of UWSEM, and with one stakeholder^b in the Detroit area. Child Trends staff also conducted telephone interviews with the five subgrantee independent evaluators and five additional stakeholders. The recorded interview data were later cleaned and coded (using NVivo software) to identify common themes.

Data Collection Procedures

The Child Trends research team conducted semi-structured individual or group interviews. Group interviews were conducted when more than one individual served on a given team, or when they shared the same role. All interviews were approximately one hour long. Participants provided written or verbal informed consent prior to all interviews. A note-taker documented responses to interview questions, and interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent. Interviews were transcribed from the recordings shortly after they took place.

^b In this report, the term “stakeholder” refers to an individual engaged professionally with a SIF program but not directly involved in program activities and not a subgrantee employee. For instance, an implementation partner (e.g., a staff member at a school site) or an individual involved in the process of writing the program implementation narratives would be considered a stakeholder. Stakeholders interviewed as part of this evaluation were referred by subgrantee organizations given their familiarity with the SIF program.

Respondents who had not been interviewed in previous visits were asked to describe their role in the SIF initiative. Those who had previously participated in in-person or phone interviews were asked about any changes to their roles or responsibilities, and about the current progress of SIF work at their organizations.

Interview protocols varied by role and covered various aspects of participation in the SIF initiative, including evaluations (subgrantee- and portfolio-level), program implementation, and fundraising. Many respondents were also asked about the SIF goals of knowledge-sharing, program scale-up, and sustainability of program activities following the end of the initiative. All respondents were asked about current successes or challenges associated with program implementation and other aspects of the SIF initiative. This final round of data collection emphasized respondents' perspectives on changes over the course of the initiative, as well as planning and preparation for the end of the initiative.

- *SIF leads* were asked to discuss the influence of the SIF initiative on their organization. SIF leads also provided their perspectives on data collection and evaluation, what an ideally successful SIF initiative would look like, the partnerships formed as a result of the initiative, and the SIF goals of knowledge-sharing, sustainability, and scale-up.
- *Program facilitators* were asked to discuss implementation of their SIF-funded program (including its staffing, participants, recruitment and retention, and data collection) and their perspectives on the evaluation components of the initiative. Program facilitators also described barriers and facilitators experienced during the initiative, along with demographic features of the populations they serve. They also

discussed their impressions of the successes and lessons learned through implementing the program.

- *Internal data staff and external evaluators* were asked to discuss whether they had met their data collection objectives, and how they foresaw the role of data collection and analysis after the completion of SIF. Internal data staff described support received from UWSEM, the tasks associated with data collection and management, and the usefulness of the evaluation. External evaluators discussed their evaluation plans, their experiences working with program and UWSEM-SIF staff on the evaluation, their reactions to the portfolio-level evaluation strategy (and any suggestions), and their overall perspectives on the SIF initiative. Internal data staff and external evaluators described barriers and facilitators to the evaluation, and specific successes and challenges in their evaluation-related work.

Interviews

In total, 34 participants were interviewed. These participants included six SIF Leads, nine program facilitators, four subgrantee data staff, five independent evaluators, six stakeholders, and four UWSEM staff.

SIF leads. SIF leads served as project managers for the subgrantees. They were liaisons with UWSEM and evaluators, managed program facilitators, and supported other aspects of the grant as needed. Six SIF leads were interviewed, all of whom had been with the SIF initiative during the previous series of interviews in April 2016. The executive director at one organization was new, and the current SIF lead had previously held the role of program coordinator. At another organization, two SIF leads were interviewed together, one having been promoted from a program facilitator. While

interviews were generally with a single SIF lead, two people participated in the SIF lead interview at two organizations.

Program facilitators. Program facilitators were subgrantee employees responsible for program implementation. For some subgrantees, facilitators worked directly with parents and/or children to deliver the SIF program. For others, program facilitators coordinated implementation, working with staff from other organizations (e.g., teachers at Head Start sites) who delivered the program. Nine program facilitators were interviewed. One was new to the initiative since April 2016 and two had new titles since the prior site visit. The majority of program facilitator interviews were conducted one-on-one; however, two programs had multiple facilitators, so one pair of facilitators and one group of three were each interviewed together.

Internal data staff. Four program data personnel were interviewed. With one exception, they had been in their positions during the last set of interviews. Two of these interviews were conducted with a single data person, while one included two program data team members.

Independent evaluators. Five independent evaluators were interviewed by phone. All interviewees had been evaluating their respective programs since the last set of interviews in April 2016. One evaluator did not participate in the scheduled interview and another was unavailable, due to maternity leave. Overall, three interviews consisted of a single evaluator and one included two evaluators.

Stakeholders. A total of six stakeholders were interviewed. One interview was conducted in-person during the final site visit; the remainder were conducted by phone (three phone interviews were one-on-one, while the fourth included a pair of stakeholders).

UWSEM staff. Four interviews were conducted with staff from UWSEM. All four took place at UWSEM's Detroit office. A follow-up to one of the interviews took place by phone. The four UWSEM staff members had the following major roles in the SIF initiative:

- Supporting subgrantees in scaling and replication
- Providing oversight and support to subgrantees and connecting the SIF initiative with UWSEM's strategic vision
- Acting as a first point of contact with subgrantees, focusing on billing, compliance, and evaluation

Interview Recruitment

Child Trends researchers contacted SIF leads at each subgrantee organization via email, with a list of names and roles of potential respondents. SIF leads confirmed this information, invited program facilitators and internal data managers, and helped coordinate interview times for these staff. Child Trends contacted external evaluators directly to schedule phone interviews after confirming contact information with SIF leads. In addition, Child Trends reached out to the subgrantee organizations for their recommendations of appropriate stakeholders that would be interested in being interviewed.

Data Analysis

The research team held a series of debriefing meetings to identify common themes emerging from the data. These themes were used to develop a coding scheme applied to each section of the interview protocol, such as the progress of work, challenges, successes, and lessons learned. Transcribed documents were coded using NVivo 10 software (QSR International, Inc.).

Findings

Improved Practices

Throughout the SIF initiative, subgrantees used their interviews to share both challenges encountered and benefits gained from participation. While some subgrantees were hesitant to undertake an evaluation with similar rigor and reporting requirements again, all felt that their participation in the initiative served their program and organization overall as an opportunity for learning and growing. This section summarizes the knowledge gained and improvements made by subgrantees—primarily in data management and evaluation capacity—as a result of participation in the initiative.

Improvements instituted by UWSEM are also discussed.

Subgrantees developed a range of organizational capacities. Across organizations, there was a shared sentiment by subgrantees that their ownership of programs increased over the duration of the project. Participants reported being more aware of, and better prepared to address, implementation challenges, and more comfortable managing the requirements of participation in SIF. Some organizations shared that knowledge gained from the SIF initiative helped them improve practices that can be applied to their other programs. When talking about accomplishments through the SIF initiative, one facilitator observed:

The work was just building a base for next year [2018]. Now we have the people, the resources. Now we need to implement all this. For new initiatives, when it comes to logistics, we know that we need transportation, give me child care, more staff.

Several other respondents agreed that participation in the initiative had a positive impact on organizational procedures. One SIF lead indicated that internal lines of communication had improved, along with accounting

procedures. A UWSEM staff member similarly commented on improved financial tracking and reporting among subgrantees. A program facilitator shared that the organization now felt more confident undertaking similar initiatives: “We know how to work with a federal grant, how do we deal with the compliances.” These improvements reflected a deeper understanding of organizational capacity and a clearer sense of how to address gaps in capacity.

Participation helped foster an evaluation culture within subgrantee organizations. The rigor of the evaluation proved to be a challenge for subgrantees (see Challenges below). However, throughout the initiative, subgrantees not only developed their evaluation infrastructure (as noted in earlier reports), but staff came to understand the value, for programs, of the data collected as part of their Subgrantee Evaluation Plan (SEP). Moreover, they began using these data to refine their programs. Evaluators noted that conversations around data reflected this growing appreciation among program staff:

Every time we send [the subgrantee] any kind of data or talk about evaluation data, there’s always a discussion about how can they use it to improve their program. Throughout the entire course of this project, every year, especially for the implementation and process evaluation, they’ve made adjustments moving forward.

Of course, some program changes may have been informed as much by common sense as by data (as one subgrantee noted)—for example, an adjustment to a class schedule that resulted in increased attendance. However, organization staff became more comfortable overall with the data; as a result, they were better prepared to make informed decisions to address challenges.

UWSEM refined its selection criteria for SIF 2016. UWSEM staff discussed their own organizational improvements. In particular, they were able to use what they learned from the challenges and successes of the 2011 SIF cohort to refine the selection criteria for their newly awarded SIF initiative, “Bib to Backpack.” Given that raising match funds proved to be a persistent challenge for most subgrantees (see Challenges below), UWSEM strove to be more strategic in selecting organizations with the requisite capacity for fundraising. As indicators of this capacity, UWSEM considered an organization’s track record of raising match funding, their staff bandwidth, and their expertise in fundraising:

We would meet agencies, and look to see if they had a development member staff in the meeting. Do they have one? Or if they have one, and they aren’t in the meeting, and didn’t invite them to the site visit for their bid, that is telling, that showed a lack of sophistication in what is required. In some ways, the questions that agencies asked us (or the more questions) about match requirements was a good indicator about their efforts raising match.

In addition to fundraising capacity, UWSEM also looked at the candidate organization’s ability to implement a model with fidelity, its capacity to collect data, and its willingness to engage in collective learning. When explaining this collective approach, UWSEM staff reported:

That is still a key thing because, with SIF, you have to be willing to accept that things will be changing all the time because of the evaluation, because of staff turnover, things happening at the federal level. You have to work together to solve any problems, so with this SIF, it’s more collaborative.

Earlier Child Trends reports discussed how some of the challenges shared by subgrantees (e.g., fundraising, data collection tools, and common outcome measures) were rooted, in part, in the absence of a collaborative process from the beginning of the initiative. Looking ahead to the next SIF cohort, UWSEM aims to ensure that collaboration is at the forefront. One staff member shared a few things they are doing as part of this effort:

First thing is we're doing one evaluation and everyone is using the exact same assessment tool. We're taking more of a network approach this time, rather than everybody doing something different—so, I think really taking more of a collective impact approach is something we learned from this [cohort].

UWSEM also plans to use a more collaborative approach to support fundraising: “I think one of the things we could have been better about, and we’ll hopefully attempt this time, is like more of a funders’ collaborative for the subgrantees and potentially ourselves.”

Overall, UWSEM staff felt that participating in SIF 2011 enhanced their organization’s capacity to manage this type of grant and anticipate challenges. This, in turn, helped position UWSEM “to pass that technical expertise or capacity on to our partners to make them more robust in their communities.”

Leadership Support and Subgrantee Growth

Through their involvement in the SIF initiative, several subgrantees developed their ability to collect and use data, cultivated and fostered longstanding community partnerships, and increased their organizational and staff capacity to oversee large-scale grants. One subgrantee also leveraged this opportunity to refocus the direction of its programming. Over the years, several subgrantees and UWSEM have stated that the SIF

initiative created opportunities, albeit sometimes risky ones, for growth. However, the extent to which subgrantees took advantage of these opportunities was largely contingent upon their leadership's investment in the SIF-funded program.

UWSEM also experienced positive change over the course of the SIF initiative. UWSEM staff shared that the initiative "brought a level of sophistication to our department." Participation in the initiative underscored the need for additional capacity to undertake robust evaluations, and to ensure that UWSEM can communicate findings communicates to their stakeholders. This resulted in the creation of the new Research and Learning Department, which allows UWSEM to conduct research activities and coordinate current research projects. While UWSEM staff did not attribute this change entirely to the initiative, they felt that the initiative helped make knowledge-sharing a priority. One staff member shared:

The realization that [UWSEM] can generate a lot of big data, a lot of quality data, helped validate the importance of having consistent metrics and ways to report out. I think it was very limited before, and now it's a core priority.

The addition of a Research and Learning Department provided a space for UWSEM to encourage subgrantees to pursue opportunities that would benefit them long-term. A UWSEM staff member shared that the purpose of the Research and Learning Department is, in part, to coordinate all research efforts that UWSEM might be involved in. In addition, "[T]hey can [provide] technical assistance to funded partners ... Talking to a funded partner, and what supports they need, and other strategies they should pursue."

Over the course of the initiative, subgrantees reported that the SIF initiative was a catalyst in sparking infrastructural changes. Some subgrantees

focused on increasing their internal capacity to manage and execute the goals of the initiative, while others focused on framing their programming to best meet the needs of their participants. During the June 2017 round of data collection, subgrantees and UWSEM both raised a centrally important factor in organizational progress: the enthusiasm of leadership for both the concept of the SIF initiative and the subgrantee program itself. For example, one subgrantee, despite being a small organization, was able to increase its capacity because leadership perceived the benefits associated with participating in such an initiative, as well as the risks. As a result of this persistence, the organization grew over the duration of the project and a UWSEM staff member felt that this could largely be attributed to certain factors, such as the leadership's "appetite for risk":

[Subgrantee] took that risk by joining the SIF. [SIF lead] always described it as a bold move to join the SIF. [Subgrantee] took that risk, and they struggled for the first years. They struggled with recruitment, their evaluation, they struggled with financial compliance, they struggled with match. They made it through because of [SIF lead's] force of will. Now, [SIF lead] stepped back and there is a new leader in the organization. [SIF lead] got them over that growth hurdle, but I really see a lot of impact in leadership.

Looking back, [Subgrantee] took a risk that could have caused them to go down under. They rolled up their sleeves and worked really hard. Now, they are on the other side, and have the new energy from their new executive director so they can be carried forward.

Other subgrantees said the initiative gave their leadership teams an opportunity to evaluate programming, to discern its core features, and to determine how best to market it to external audiences. Through participation in the SIF initiative, one subgrantee was able to conceptualize multiple ways

of branding and marketing their program. Its leaders used these to speak with prospective funders, legislators, and other key influencers to promote the program. One UWSEM staff member noted:

[T]hey have something that they can license and go out of state with. They can work this into a whole bunch of funding streams—whether it's fee-for-service or getting it integrated into Head Start curricula, or whether it's getting an actual line item in a state budget. They see that there a lot of opportunities for this.

According to a UWSEM staff member, one benefit of the SIF initiative, for the aforementioned organization, was the opportunity to re-evaluate its work through a new lens:

With [Subgrantee], in particular, [after I joined United Way] and first saw the [Program] curriculum, I thought, this is great, but looks childish and lacks sophistication. I remember thinking they should look into getting this redone and go for a professional illustrator early on. They did, and revised the [Program], and it's now professionally done. It has a fancier sheen to it. [Subgrantee staff member] said I was the reason why they redid the [Program]. To me, it seemed like an obvious thing. I wouldn't take credit for that. But, I guess, I said something—because I was a newcomer to the space, and to me it was obvious. They were so engaged in the work on a day-to-day level, so you lose sight of the bigger picture. I think that's an example of [how] the subgrantees have been challenged as we've gone along—actually stopping and looking with fresh eyes. I think [Subgrantee] has successfully done that.

A similar opportunity to examine programming more closely was afforded to another subgrantee. As a result, this organization began thinking more

constructively about the direction of their programming and services for the community. They came to understand their program's essential components. A UWSEM staff member shared the following remarks about how the organization had matured as a result of participating in the initiative:

Their intervention has four components, and they've really realized the [Program] is the one that means the most, and can do the most with I think that is where the [subgrantees] have grown over the life of the grant. They've had the space to step out of the everyday, by being evaluated, being a part of a learning community, by going to the SIF convening. They've gotten out of their bubbles, and are able to look at their work with a different perspective and make some changes as a program, and see some opportunities for growth.

Moreover, this subgrantee shared that, because of SIF, they have changed their programming to have an early childhood focus, with a strong emphasis on development and implementation of a two-generation approach. Previously, they had implemented two-generation programming without a specific focus on early childhood. The SIF lead shared:

[In the past], [Organization] was very much focused on the two-generation programming I think we are now moving in a bigger early childhood direction, with two-generation programming as part of that We are starting to get more involved in early childhood work. So, that's something that we haven't necessarily been a part of, before SIF We're noticing that there's this big push for early childhood, especially here in Detroit We want to be a part of that, and move with the direction that the city is going in.

One of the greatest opportunities that participation in SIF provided for organizations and leadership was the ability to take risks that ultimately

strengthened their programs and, in some cases, shifted their focus toward greater impact. For the two organizations discussed above, SIF offered a space for leadership to adapt programming to needs in their service areas, and to develop strategies to effectively market their organizations and position them as regional leaders in the early childhood field.

Numerous studies highlight the importance of leadership to successful program development and implementation, and to long-term program sustainability, effective resource allocation, and preserving the organization's overall health.¹¹ Although some subgrantees struggled with certain aspects of the initiative, such as compliance with its financial requirements, they were ultimately able to succeed because of buy-in from their leadership.

Without leaders' investment in the expansion of programming, some subgrantees merely maintained the status quo. One, in particular, made a commitment only to the activities they established in their initial proposal, and chose to remain a small but agile community organization. A UWSEM staff member shared:

[The SIF Lead] at [Subgrantee], she's like that's it—we're not getting bigger, we're not doing this, we're not doing that. She's got really good reasons for that. She's focused on the core services, and she's not going to go beyond that. I get that.

One UWSEM staff member surmised that the organization's lack of appetite for risk stemmed from its size and need to be conservative. This conservatism may also have played a role in the subgrantee's decision to forgo continued implementation of its program once SIF ended, as leaders were determined to maintain what they deemed core services. As one UWSEM staff member shared, "[Subgrantee] is the most painful one for me that will not be continuing their program. They are not continuing the

program, because [SIF lead] says the money is going away, and it's not a part of their core services."

Leadership at another subgrantee similarly did not perceive participation in SIF in terms of the opportunities it afforded the organization. Throughout the initiative, this organization experienced ongoing difficulties in meeting initiative requirements, including raising match funds, retaining staff, and completing other financial requirements of the grant. In addition (and perhaps relatedly), leadership investment in the health of the program was weak. One UWSEM staff member noted that this subgrantee's SIF-funded program was kept separate from its other programs, which in turn played a role in its persistent struggles with compliance. Interestingly, in contrast to the previous example, this organization's large size may have been a factor. One UWSEM staff member shared:

They are always at risk for financial compliance, because leadership is not invested. This initiative has always been sequestered at [Subgrantee], and the leadership does not engage with the initiative. It's off on its own. And while the data and results are really good, they are at-risk of being booted out of the portfolio because of noncompliance. They are a huge organization, and I think that's part of the problem. That is a large part of the problem. [Subgrantee's SIF budget] is so small in their operating budget, so they don't care. Which, I think is shortsighted on their part. [Another subgrantee's reaction was], yes, this is a small budget but we can use this as an opportunity to lever to grow. [Subgrantee] did not see it the same way.

Overall, this evaluation underscores the importance of leadership buy-in and support as key to an organization's success within the initiative. In some cases, organizational leadership saw the initiative's potential as a launching

pad to improve their organizational infrastructure, and to evaluate and modify their organization's programming. In others, leadership did not use the initiative to leverage organizational capacity. The route taken appears to depend on leadership's ability to envision how the SIF initiative could provide opportunities for organization-wide growth. When leaders valued this opportunity, their organizations effectively used available resources and flourished.

Challenges

Over the course of the SIF initiative, subgrantees encountered numerous challenges to recruiting participants, retaining them in the program, and delivering services. A variety of factors accounted for these challenges, from the characteristics of programs' specific target populations to stipulations of the SIF initiative. These challenges often fed into one another. For example, subgrantee staff often noted that program participants were relatively transient, with a high proportion of families changing residences while enrolled in services. If participants moved outside of the SIF-specific zip codes, staff could not keep them in the SIF-funded programs. Instead, they had to search for alternative services.

Subgrantee staff described working to address the challenges, and shared that they were able to resolve some. For example, several facilitators reported that the initiative's initial pilot phase was extremely helpful for identifying various best practices for programs. However, other difficulties—especially those related to recruitment and evaluation—persisted throughout the initiative and had no clear resolution.

Many subgrantees struggled to fully engage their target population. The greater Detroit area is home to an extremely diverse group of families: U.S. citizens and recent immigrants; long-time Detroit residents and newcomers;

English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, Arabic-speaking, and more; those familiar with existing ties to social service organizations in the community and those unaware of them. Several subgrantees had already tailored their programming to be culturally appropriate for participants. By the final year of the initiative, the remaining challenges were related to recruiting and retaining participants. One program facilitator described how the word-of-mouth approach to recruitment was less successful than anticipated:

For parents, in the beginning ... our recruitment, it was word-of-mouth, they hear about us and then they come. But when we reached a point that we need to have the numbers, we started attending some events and bringing people to the program. It went well, but I see that parents in that area didn't know who we are, didn't know who we are exists.

Recruitment difficulties were highlighted by the limitations imposed by SIF-related zip codes. According to one facilitator, a major challenge was how to handle families who were a good fit for the program but who resided outside of the SIF area. Others noted that it was, in fact, far more difficult to recruit participants within the SIF area, compared with other neighborhoods. A subgrantee staff member who worked both within the SIF zone and north of it discussed this difficulty:

The recruitment techniques we use in the rest of the county don't work as well here in the SIF program. It's just demographics and, culturally, people being much more wary of people coming into their home ... In the north part of the county, my recruitment is—essentially, we put out a flyer and we're usually full within a couple of days. We do that for a few groups for the SIF area and we're lucky if we get two moms, they come twice, and they usually don't come back.

As this quote indicates, sustaining participation was a challenge, even among those successfully recruited. Lines of communication with participants were easily broken. Phone numbers used by staff to contact participants sometimes went out of service, forcing facilitators to visit participants' homes to make contact with them. Program staff also noted that participants changed residences at a high rate and occasionally returned to their home countries for extended periods of time. When participants "move or bounce around from neighborhood to neighborhood," staff struggled with how best to locate them: "My families, you never know [if participants are in the same home]—so I don't go door to door. Because if they're not, you never know who's going to answer."

Staff from several subgrantees also described encountering resistance from the husbands of participants and potential participants—what one respondent called the "male factor"—that posed challenges to both recruitment and sustained participation. One subgrantee staff member described her experience trying to engage participants in a program activity: "For a trip we planned, I waited and waited and parents didn't come. One parent said, 'My husband didn't want to take me.' [Participants] don't get it's a mutual thing. It really frustrates me." In some cases, facilitators succeeded in changing the husband's mind simply by meeting him first, so he knew who was working with his family. One facilitator recalled a husband who continually provided excuses for why his wife could not sign up for the program; however, after discussing each excuse with the facilitator, he eventually relented. Unfortunately, in other cases, facilitators faced a higher degree of resistance, and the "male factor" effectively restricted participation.

Beyond the immediate difficulties encountered in recruiting and retaining participants, some facilitators also described difficulties in delivering services

to target populations. One explained that she encountered more variation than expected in children’s emotional development, which complicated her planning and preparation:

We really have to assess where they are emotionally. There are activities where I can go into a classroom and, no, it’s not going to be a problem, but there are other classrooms where you think, “It’s not going to work.” ... The kids will be four, but I’m doing activities for an older two or a young three. So, every week is different, and every classroom. I spent a lot of time doing prep work that would not be typical in any other [program].

In previous reports, Child Trends alluded to the importance of seemingly minor changes in program delivery. In the past, for example, staff noted making small adjustments to better suit their target population—such as splitting program lessons into two—to provide more time for participants to learn and discuss the material. In other cases, facilitators mentioned that some participants received more of one program component and less of another, potentially shifting the balance away from what was prescribed in the original program model.

Many programs were short-staffed, according to their facilitators. Several subgrantees encountered insufficient staff for recruiting and serving the target number of participants. Individuals from three of the five subgrantees indicated that having more staff would make things easier. This need varied somewhat, with one SIF lead indicating that it “would be nice,” whereas a facilitator from another subgrantee explained that getting more staff was critical. Asked if the organization would hire more on-the-ground staff, she responded emphatically:

They better, if they want me. Because, you know—I got so overwhelmed last year. And I said, "Just put me part-time. I don't want to work here full-time. I'm tired. You need to recruit people, so hire some people." At the same time, I cannot leave ... But I reached the point where I was overwhelmed, "I don't want to work anymore." But, thank god, we made it.

Staff from other subgrantees discussed the difficulties that staff turnover imposed on their work, forcing the organization to play catch-up, or placing a greater burden on those who remained. Several staff members indicated that this issue restricted the number of families they could serve, relative to their goals. One facilitator described her organization's target number as "honestly insane ... with the staffing we had, or even triple it." Others echoed this sentiment. Although the interviews did not explicitly address the reasons underlying staff turnover, one facilitator felt that the burden of survey administration, described below, was the key driver behind staff turnover, further increasing the challenges to program delivery.

Language and literacy barriers hampered data collection efforts. Previous reports discussed how subgrantee staff felt that their ability to collect data had improved over the course of the initiative. The latest round of interviews addressed the ways in which participants' background characteristics interacted with program activities, which underscored that significant challenges remained. In particular, the variety of languages spoken by participants posed a challenge to program delivery, with some subgrantees short on staff who could communicate in participants' primary languages (typically Arabic or Bengali). These language barriers, combined with the low literacy of many participants, also led to widespread difficulty in data collection for evaluation purposes—particularly survey data. Staff from several subgrantees discussed the need to translate their surveys, and a few

subgrantee evaluators shared concerns about using a translated instrument with a population for whom it had not yet been scientifically validated.

Language barriers compounded another issue that subgrantee staff repeatedly described over the course of the initiative: the time and effort needed to collect data. Facilitators repeatedly noted that surveys were lengthy and inconvenient for parents; language and literacy factors further contributed to the time spent administering surveys, thereby adding to the inconvenience. Even when surveys were translated, several facilitators found that the reading level of participants necessitated an oral review of the survey to clarify difficult-to-understand items. In the words of one facilitator:

The surveys killed us ... It wasn't easy, conducting surveys. You have to read the questions, and the scale of the survey was so difficult for parents to understand it. "Strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree"—they only know yes and no, and not more than this.

Facilitators at another subgrantee explained that they found themselves providing more support than just reading a translated survey to participants; they often felt they had no choice but to write the responses as well:

Facilitator 1: The problem is, [parents] cannot write it in Arabic too. They can answer in Arabic, but they cannot ...

Facilitator 2: This is why we write it. The surveys [have] a lot of issues... We [talked] about surveys a very long time ago.

Program delivery challenges also impacted data collection efforts. Difficulties in maintaining contact with participants (described above) also posed a challenge to survey administration and likely reduced sample sizes. One facilitator pointed out that collecting data from members of the control group

was an additional challenge, due to more limited relationships with those individuals coupled with the residential mobility issues noted above.

Further, some facilitators and evaluators discussed the possibility that social desirability factors may have biased participants' survey responses; participants may have responded in ways that they believed they *should* respond, rather than in ways that aligned with their experiences. Such issues are common threats to validity in studies of this kind. For example, if parents on an initial survey were to exaggerate the extent to which they engage in literacy-promoting parenting practices, this could minimize the observed difference in such practices between the initial and final surveys, leading to conclusions of minimal program impacts. Ideally, survey protocols include instructions to respondents to answer as honestly as they can, and are structured in such a way as to elicit accurate estimates.

Subgrantees experienced ongoing difficulties with match fundraising. Over the course of the initiative, several subgrantees experienced difficulties raising sufficient match funds. Staff members from these organizations shared that match fundraising was difficult for several reasons: 1) exhausting local funding streams and opportunities, 2) increased competition among early childhood providers in the Detroit region, and 3) unmet expectations of UWSEM to foster interagency collaboration in the effort to raise match funds. One UWSEM staff member acknowledged that match fundraising was a persistent challenge for subgrantees because "there were promises made about match, about coordinated fundraising" that were not fulfilled.

On the other hand, UWSEM expected that, by the end of the initiative, subgrantees would have improved their internal infrastructure and/or expanded their funder lists and funding models. That is, their expectation was that subgrantees would have moved toward fee-for-service or other

funding models that would allow them to be self-sufficient. By the summer 2017 site visit, two subgrantees were exploring or had taken steps toward more sustainable funding mechanisms, such as billing insurance.

Several subgrantee and UWSEM staff members surmised that match funding had played a pivotal role in other subgrantees exiting the portfolio earlier than intended. One UWSEM staff member shared, “The match requirement is also a very heavy lift for some of our organizations.” Although no subgrantees fully exited the initiative between fall 2016 and summer 2017, when the most recent site visit was conducted, one organization that was part of a subgrantee collaborative effort did depart—it had planned for five years of participation and preferred not to participate in a sixth. Overall, this compares very favorably with earlier in the initiative, when several subgrantees might depart in a season.

“The Books”: Implementation Narratives of SIF-Funded Programs

The last two years of the initiative placed a greater focus on scaling and replication efforts. This section highlights these efforts and the knowledge-sharing aims of the SIF initiative. During the spring 2016 data collection, subgrantees briefly mentioned that they envisioned using the guides developed with support from UWSEM as a tool to spread the word about their SIF-funded program, and as a possible resource for fundraising. With the first iteration of the guides finalized, during the summer 2017 site visit subgrantees discussed the value of the books for their work in scaling, replication, and sustaining their SIF-funded activities.

The purpose of the books evolved over time. Assessments of the books’ value rested on respondents’ perceptions of their purpose. Even among UWSEM staff, there were different visions. For instance, some staff wanted a tangible product that promoted UWSEM’s brand, others wanted a narrative

product that introduced the program to external audiences, and still others wanted implementation manuals that offered step-by-step directions on implementing the programs in a variety of settings with different populations. One UWSEM staff member shared how her thinking about the books had evolved:

I don't think the books look exactly like we envisioned. I'm sure the way the books ended up is a little different than how [other UWSEM staff] were thinking. But, the way they are now, you can't implement a program based on the books, which is what I wanted. That's why I wanted implementation manuals. In retrospect, I don't think that would have gone very far. With the books instead, you have something that communicates what seems intangible and hard to grasp to people, like "What is an English language learners program? Or what is El Arte? What is Detroit Wolftrap? What does this mean? Or what are all of these things?" The books make these things that seem wonky, approachable. And so, what is nice about the books, they sit on the desk in a nice kind of set, and the books end up becoming these calling cards that people like to receive. I'm not sure if they are reading them. They want to hold them. We've given them to legislators and corporate funders. And the mere idea of these books, because they are making something intangible, tangible, they have opened doors in a different way. It's not doing what I hoped they would do, but it's doing something different and it's given an emotional connection to the work.

Subgrantees echoed the idea that the purpose of the books had evolved over time as the writing process progressed. When the idea of the books was first introduced by UWSEM, subgrantees were under the impression that the final deliverable would be an implementation manual. One SIF lead shared,

“It was called the ‘implementation manual.’ Totally different than ‘book.’ Different vibe altogether ... The term ‘implementation manual’ sounded very sterile to us.”

Some subgrantees were wary of creating an implementation manual—which would be owned and marketed by UWSEM, rather than the subgrantees—because of their own organizational aspirations to brand and sell their programs to external stakeholders (e.g., state and government agencies, school districts, etc.). By the time the first iteration of the books was advanced, however, they had evolved into narratives about the programs, highlighting the voices of those who received services, and providing information about the history of the programs.

UWSEM indicated that—were they to repeat this process in the future to develop an implementation manual—creating a hard-copy book would not be the best approach. One UWSEM staff member shared the belief that an online tool would be more useful and accessible as an implementation manual: “It probably wouldn’t be a paper version anymore; this would be something that would live online and be easily changeable, rather than going the more traditional publishing route.”

Subgrantees shared mixed feelings about the value of the books. During the summer 2017 site visit, subgrantees had mixed feelings about the evaluation of the guides. Some still had reservations and felt that, although the books were potentially useful, the money would have been better spent on programming. When asked what the money should have been spent on (if not the books), one subgrantee staff member was quick to respond: “Service delivery. To me, take the book out of the equation.” A staff member from another subgrantee explained:

I mean, I do like the book now. I don't know if that's what we need. I think it's cool. I think it would have been more beneficial to spend money elsewhere, but I do like it, but I wonder how we will maintain it going forward. I think it does have its potential, but we have to figure out who those people are that we need to get it out to.

Not all subgrantees shared these reservations; some had very positive feedback about the books. One SIF lead reported, "Our book has become a great source of pride and a symbol of where we are at, our maturity and our evolution, too, so we've shared that proudly with potential funders and partners." Additionally, a facilitator reported:

It was great to have a student highlighted. When we had the book release, we had a parent talk about her experience in [program] and it was powerful to hear from her. I think it's a great tool to give other organizations or programs that want to do something similar ...

Many subgrantees intend to use the books as a tool for knowledge sharing.

The tenets of the SIF initiative emphasize knowledge sharing, which entails documenting and disseminating lessons learned, best practices, and strategies. Many respondents shared their plans to use the books in this way—to provide information about their program(s) to external audiences and to raise money, educate prospective funders and community stakeholders, and spread the word about their program(s).

Subgrantees shared a variety of plans for using the books, and who they believed should be the audience. One way that subgrantees are expanding their program's reach—and increasing awareness of their services and impact in the community—is by disseminating the books to legislators, policymakers, and other key government officials. One staff member shared, "I think they should get it to some legislators. Let them see what is

happening, influence policy.” Two organizations have embedded their books into the curricula of social work classes at the University of Michigan, and two others are selling their books online. Others planned to share their books with organizations implementing similar programs, or with current and potential participants themselves. While the strategies used to share the books differ across organizations, respondents agreed that the books are a valuable tool for other organizations working with similar populations, and could serve as a blueprint to replicate the program. One SIF lead noted:

I think the purpose of the book is to actually give someone a physical representation of what we do. And it makes it more easily accessible, because I tell people all the time what I do, what the program does, what the people I work with do, and the families, but they don't understand until they are able to actually experience for themselves.

Planning for marketing the books has been a priority for subgrantees. Some are still in the process of developing a marketing strategy, whereas others have already begun using their books to obtain funding and increase their program's reach. Subgrantees have advertised the book as their capacity allows; for instance, one organization has held several book events with speakers from the community in attendance, and is planning a book tour.

Overall, the books have afforded subgrantees increased visibility in the Detroit metropolitan region and have given them unique opportunities to gain national exposure for their work. A staff member shared, “[The book is] good to make connections—dealing with the books has put us in touch with some very knowledgeable people in relation to media and publishing, and things like that. And that has been extremely helpful.” One subgrantee pointed out that UWSEM has been a key facilitator in leveraging the books. This leverage helps subgrantees make connections with other organizations and stakeholders in the community, and helps expand and grow their

programs. Looking ahead, the books will be updated to include preliminary evaluation results once they become available.

Life after SIF

As the initiative comes to an end, subgrantees shared their priorities and future plans for their SIF-funded programs. During the spring 2016 site visit, there was a consensus that subgrantees had learned many important skills and had hopes for their programs' continuation. During the summer 2017 site visit, subgrantees across the board echoed this sentiment, sharing their thoughts about the value of the SIF-funded program in their communities. Moreover, they described initial steps taken to sustain their program(s) beyond the life of the grant. All but one subgrantee plans to continue offering SIF-funded program(s) once the grant ends. Plans for sustainability and expansion of the programs vary depending on organizational capacity, size, and ability to secure sufficient funding.

Two subgrantees indicated that they will continue implementing their programs under the new 2016 SIF grant ("Bib to Backpack"). Two other subgrantees have secured (or are in the process of securing) additional funding to sustain their programs. One subgrantee was not yet sure if it would be able to continue implementing its program due to funding constraints, going on to explain that there would be a gap in services in the community if the program were to stop operating. The organization's priority, as reported by staff, was to secure funding and leverage its book to create awareness for the program. In general, regardless of whether they had already secured funding to support programming, subgrantees agreed that funding was one of the main priorities moving forward—funding largely dictates the types of services subgrantees can offer, the number of staff they can hire, and their overall reach.

Subgrantees do not plan to make major changes to their programs. One SIF lead noted, “We might just be adding on. We’re not going to take anything away. And nothing is seriously going to change. If anything, it would just be like the schedule.” That said, subgrantees indicated that they would likely scale back their approaches to evaluation after the grant ends, continuing to collect data but likely not with the same rigor as required by SIF. One internal data staff member shared, “I think we’re going to take a year off of data-related evaluation. Although we will be using surveys to measure the effectiveness of the program, based on our own kinds of systems.” The same organization discussed using the results from the evaluation to take a step back and think of what outcomes they want to measure moving forward.

Subgrantees shared a range of approaches to program scale-up. For instance, several subgrantees plan to extend their reach to new areas within the county, to new counties, and/or to new school districts. On the other hand, one subgrantee’s expansion strategy will focus primarily on marketing its program so that other organizations can use it.

In retrospect, one respondent shared that planning for scaling and replication should have begun earlier in the initiative, when the main focus was on compliance and evaluation. This respondent indicated that funding for capacity development and sustainability should have been part of the conversation early on: “Not necessarily doing any activities, but at least start thinking about it earlier on, as to where we are going.” Technical assistance dollars provided by UWSEM later in the initiative, combined with the books discussed earlier, have helped support capacity building and knowledge sharing; supporting program sustainability was an explicit goal. One UWSEM staff member explained:

[Subgrantee], we’ve helped give them technical assistance monies to get with a lawyer to copyright their products ... [so] they can sell it in a

way that will sustain the program ... [T]hat's a huge piece in allowing this to live on in the future so that other people can buy it, so they can have a train-the-trainer sort of model.

Recommendations

In preparation for SIF 2016, UWSEM has already incorporated several lessons learned from the SIF 2011 initiative:

Single SEP. For the “Bib to Backpack” initiative, UWSEM selected a single evaluation partner to develop and implement one SEP for the entire portfolio. Having a single SEP instead of many will also reduce the number of evaluation instruments in the initiative. Because SEPs presented steep challenges in SIF 2011, being able to focus on following, maintaining, and revising one SEP will reduce the burden on the evaluator. Additionally, bringing all subgrantees under one evaluation umbrella will increase the statistical power of the study, allowing for more rigorous analysis.

Collective match fundraising. Competition for match funds among both subgrantees and UWSEM led to challenges in fundraising throughout the initiative. Several new aligned giving strategies to support SIF 2016 subgrantees will be investigated and tested in the coming funding cycles. This should help secure match funding through multiple aligned funding streams.

Subgrantee selection based on qualifications. UWSEM’s process for subgrantee selection for SIF 2011 accounted for not only the size and capacity of subgrantees, but also other factors, including ties to the community. Since then, UWSEM switched to a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process in its subgrantee selection. The RFQ will allow UWSEM to filter potential portfolio members by their capacity and experience to ensure the inclusion of organizations well-suited to the SIF initiative.

Technical assistance funds. As SIF 2011 drew to a close, technical assistance funds emerged as an important resource for subgrantees to sustain and scale their programs following the SIF. With these funds, UWSEM invested in the capacity of subgrantees to serve the community in the long term.

Based on this portfolio evaluation, Child Trends offers the following recommendations for future practice:

Ensure that the number of subgrantees selected aligns with the resources available to support them. The initiative began with 11 subgrantees and ended with five. UWSEM staff and some subgrantee staff have cited a range of factors that may have contributed to subgrantees exiting the initiative. Key factors included limited organizational capacity, coupled with challenges encountered in fundraising, and a lack of commitment to SIF in the face of competing opportunities that imposed fewer requirements.

Although the loss of six subgrantees could potentially be viewed as a challenge to the overall success of the initiative, it may, in fact, have been *critical* to its success. The reduced cohort benefited from additional resources that would have otherwise been distributed more thinly. These resources were allocated in a variety of ways (e.g., technical assistance, development of publications) and supported an extra year of implementation, which was viewed as necessary to increase the statistical power of subgrantees' evaluations.

Moreover, given limited UWSEM staff resources, providing individualized support to the smaller subgrantee cohort—comprised of those organizations among the initial 11 with the greatest capacity for participation—was likely far more manageable than it would have been with the larger group of subgrantees (with vastly different levels of capacity). Subgrantees found the technical assistance and other ad hoc support during the latter part of the

initiative to be valuable—so valuable, in fact, that some remaining subgrantees might not have persevered in the initiative without UWSEM’s own persistence and tailored support. To ensure this level of support to future subgrantees, we recommend careful consideration of the number of subgrantees selected, in combination with refined selection criteria (discussed above/below).

Enhance messaging for the project within the community. Our interviews with stakeholders yielded no overall impressions of the local SIF initiative in their community. Although this was not featured as a finding in this report, it is nevertheless important. Although all stakeholders were engaged professionally with a SIF program, most were unaware of the overarching SIF project in their community and unaware of individual subgrantee participation. For instance, one stakeholder was engaged with two different SIF programs without realizing that they were both part of a larger kindergarten readiness initiative. This has potential implications for community buy-in and support of the initiative, and for participant recruitment into the SIF-funded programs. It also has implications for match fundraising in the face of exhausting local funding streams. With SIF 2016 and beyond, we recommend careful consideration of how the local initiative as a whole is marketed and messaged for its presence to be felt in the community—beyond messaging considerations for each individual subgrantee’s SIF-funded program(s).

Plan early for sustainability, scaling, and replication. Broadly speaking, there is a tendency to think about sustainability as a culminating stage of implementation, rather than as a process that unfolds alongside a program or intervention. To ensure the long-term sustainability of future SIF-funded programs—and to position subgrantees to achieve optimal levels of scale-up and/or replication appropriate to their needs—we recommend that planning

for sustainability, scale-up, and replication begin at the same time as planning for implementation.

Outcomes Evaluation

The Outcomes Evaluation Challenge

Here, the essential outcomes evaluation question is, “To what extent did subgrantees’ activities contribute to the collective outcomes adopted by the SIF initiative?”

A central challenge to answering the question is the counterfactual, or the outcomes that would have been found in the absence of these interventions.¹² In other words, what else could have accounted for the results? For example, how might we account for normal developmental growth over time? Scholars have also pointed to the difficulty of evaluating interventions that involve multi-pronged approaches; in these circumstances, it can be challenging to determine whether all parts of the intervention are actually essential.¹³

The COCI portfolio analysis can be considered an example “exploratory descriptive studies,” according to the Common Framework for Research and Evaluation of the Federal Administration for Children & Families.¹⁴ There is a need to extend intervention strategies beyond single programs to encompass systems at a community level (for example, a system that coordinates early childhood education with health services, economic supports for families, and adult skill-building).¹⁵

However, the SIF initiative—the focus of the COCI analysis—is also an example of a complex system that poses challenges to many conventional tools of evaluation. Complex systems are characterized by nonlinear relationships, feedback, sensitivity to context, unanticipated and anticipated outcomes, and dynamism over time. Thus, they require evaluations that are adaptive, flexible, and iterative.¹⁶

A Conceptual Approach to Evaluating Portfolio Outcomes: Contribution Analysis

Given this context, a contribution analysis (distinct from an attribution analysis) may be most appropriate.¹⁷ As the name suggests, this approach infers—rather than determines—causality through assessing whether one or more activities *contributed* to the observed results, thereby accounting for other plausible sources of influence. Contribution analysis relies on several types of evidence.

- First, does a theory of change (a set of detailed, plausible assumptions)¹⁸ underlie the activities? A theory of change may be explicit or implicit—that is, inferred from the initiative’s activities, the target populations for those activities, and their dosage/intensity.
- Second, is there evidence that the activities were implemented as intended?
- Third, are the short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes observed consistent with the theory of change?
- Finally, were other factors assessed that may have influenced the results, and were their contributions quantified?

In practice, not all of these criteria may be met, but the first two are essential for even a minimalist contribution analysis.¹⁹

In the case of UWSEM’s SIF, a theory of change can be inferred from the mix of strategies represented by the activities of the five subgrantees, described earlier. Three subgrantees (ACCESS, Living Arts, and SWCS) included activities aimed at improving parenting practices. Two (ACCESS and SWCS) included a specific focus on parent-child literacy; these also provided English as a Second Language (ESL) services to parents and children. MC provided

both screening and assessment and home visiting services. NKFM provided a curriculum focused on children’s nutrition and physical activity.

Taken together, these activities reflect an assumption that multifaceted strategies—encompassing family literacy, effective parenting, early identification of difficulties, and early attention to the precursors of overweight and related health problems—are required to help young children become ready to learn and to assist their parents and caregivers to nurture children’s development. This array of strategies, although incomplete, is also consistent with the concept of school readiness as a goal that requires development—not just from the child, but on the part of families, other early childhood caregivers, and communities.²⁰

Next, we briefly summarize the scientific evidence of effectiveness associated with these components. On the basis of this review, we conclude that, taken together, the activities of the SIF partners represent a theory of change that is plausible, reasonably comprehensive, and informed by research evidence.

Parenting

Evidence for the effectiveness of parenting programs—a very broad category of interventions—is mixed.²¹ However, when parents have increased knowledge of evidence-based parenting practices (such as how to use language interactively with an infant or toddler, or how to apply non-punitive forms of discipline), they are more likely than those lacking such knowledge to use those practices.²² Common areas of focus for parents of young children are decreasing child aggression and improving readiness for school;²³ there is also evidence that a preventive intervention with parents of low-income toddlers can enhance social-emotional outcomes.²⁴ In

designing interventions, it is important to account for parents' existing attitudes and beliefs.²⁵

Home visiting

High-quality home visiting, especially when part of a comprehensive community system of early childhood services, has been shown to have multiple benefits. These include improving health outcomes for mothers and children, reducing child maltreatment, improving family relationships, and supporting family economic self-sufficiency.²⁶ Parents as Teachers (PAT) is among the 19 home visiting models that meet the criteria for evidence of effectiveness set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Specifically, the federal review of PAT found the program to be effective at promoting child development and school readiness, and positive parenting practices.²⁷

Family literacy

There is strong research evidence for the value of shared literacy activities between parent and child. In particular, the frequency of joint book "reading" has been associated with modest but significantly positive gains in young children's literacy and language skills,²⁸ with social-emotional skills,²⁹ and with later school success.³⁰ Both child- and family-level factors contribute to children's early literacy.³¹

ESL (adult/child)

Nearly one in three U.S. children live in a household where a language other than English is spoken.³² While the benefits of bilingualism are well documented, parents especially may be disadvantaged if they lack facility with English. Parents who are proficient in English are more likely to attend

and participate in parent-teacher conferences, school events, and school volunteer opportunities than are parents of dual language learners.³³

Screening and assessment

The early identification of developmental concerns is instrumental in optimizing children's health and well-being.³⁴ Screening can also be effective in identifying children's social needs.³⁵

Education around nutrition and physical activity

There is mixed evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to improve the practices/habits of children and parents regarding the foods they eat and the intensity or frequency of their physical activity.³⁶ There is evidence that the NAP-SACC program can increase young children's physical activity³⁷ and reduce their body mass index.³⁸ Among the strategies considered most promising for increasing preschoolers' physical activity are the provision of portable play equipment on playgrounds and in other play spaces, training staff on the delivery of structured physical activity sessions and increasing the frequency of those sessions, integrating physical activity into other instructional areas, and increasing children's outdoor time.³⁹

Next, we describe an innovative quantitative approach to aggregating outcome data among the five programs.

A Quantitative Approach to Evaluating Portfolio Outcomes: Individual Minimum Detectable Effect Analysis

The measurement challenge: Developing a common metric of progress

In an ideal world, each subgrantee might adopt the same instrument (survey, observational tool) for each indicator, and results could be readily aggregated (rolled up) to the level of the initiative.^c However, each program is different, both in terms of its particular mix of strategies and in the characteristics of the population it serves. This suggests that a single instrument would likely not be valid, across the board, for the range of program models represented here. (See Appendix B for measures used by each program to assess one or more aspects of readiness.)

Moreover, in the case of an indicator like kindergarten readiness, there is no consensus in the field on how best to measure it.⁴⁰ There is broad agreement that readiness is multidimensional, but there is a proliferation of published instruments that purport to measure one or more of these dimensions. The Early Development Instrument⁴¹ meets many desired criteria for such an instrument. From a practical standpoint, however, programs have restricted options where assessments must be collected on substantial numbers of children with limited administrative resources. Each option is accompanied by both pros and cons.

^c At an earlier stage of the initiative (2013), serious consideration was given to using the Early Development Instrument (EDI), an assessment that initially seemed well suited to this project. The EDI is designed to measure, at a population level, children's readiness for school; thus, it can inform a number of place-based efforts that have identified this as a shared goal. However, by June 2014, the EDI strategy was no longer viable, due to difficulties in gaining the participation of kindergarten teachers and obtaining students' residential address information—both of which were essential to implementation of the EDI. Additionally, the EDI scoring protocol does not yield child-level data; thus, scores could not be linked with the initiative's other participant-level data.

An additional challenge for any given instrument is setting cut-off scores: that is, the level of competence that a child must demonstrate to be considered (in the case of the kindergarten readiness indicator) either ready or not ready. Although we encounter this kind of either/or cut-off frequently in daily life, it seems less appropriate to apply it to young children's development, which is often uneven—where what is “normal” is distributed over a fairly wide range of performance.

Yet policymakers and others, some with full appreciation of the nuances involved, will commonly ask, with some good reason, “How many of our young children are ready for school?” Researchers and early childhood professionals who cannot be responsive to such a question risk being seen as irrelevant. Moreover, given the approaches represented by the SIF initiative subgrantees, there are important opportunities here to lift up learnings that will be of broad interest to Head Start programs, home visiting initiatives, and programs working with English language learners (among others).

The challenges here are twofold:

- How do we aggregate indicator data across diverse programs using diverse measures?
- How do we designate children above or below a particular threshold, while maintaining, to the extent possible, fairness to children's development?

Individual Minimum Detectable Effect

Child Trends' approach provides a standardized metric that allows for aggregation of results across programs, but also has several other advantages:

- It accounts for the particular populations served by each program, comparing any one participant’s performance only with that of other participants within the same program.
- It recognizes participants’ progress, regardless of where they start in their performance.
- And—perhaps of greatest importance to program staff and evaluators—it does not require collection of any new data.

This approach is based on what statisticians call an “individual minimum detectable effect” (IMDE).^d In contrast to other methods that rely on national norms or other predetermined cut-offs, IMDE works from the actual scores of SIF program participants. IMDE accounts for *the number of participants on whom there are data (sample size)*, and *the variability (distribution) of their scores at two or more time points*.^e

Based on these parameters, and assuming data on sufficient numbers of participants, the formula produces a value (number) that is the *minimum* difference that can be considered indicative of meaningful change between scores *prior to* the intervention and *following* the intervention. All participants showing progress at least as great as the IMDE are considered to have benefitted from the intervention. Participants with differences between pre- and post-scores that are less than the IMDE are considered not to have made progress.^f

^d See Appendix A for details on the calculation of IMDE.

^e Alternatively, the IMDE approach can be applied to a design that includes an intervention and a control group. In that instance, the difference between the mean scores of participants in the intervention and control groups would be considered meaningful if it exceeds the IMDE derived from the two score distributions.

^f Some degree of change between Time 1 scores and Time 2 scores may not be meaningful—that is, it might have occurred for reasons unrelated to the program’s activities (the intervention). We rule out these minor differences that are below the IMDE threshold, considering them to reflect normative variation in scores.

Note that this methodology does not determine which children are ready or not ready for kindergarten. Instead, they identify significant progress. In any case, the focus here is not on individual participants, but on the proportion (percentage) of participants who made progress. This, in turn, provides a common basis for *aggregating results across programs*: we can report on the percentage of participants who made progress, regardless of which program's services they received.

Note that this analysis also identifies other important subgroups:

First, some participants may have pre-test scores at a sufficiently high level as to preclude their reaching the IMDE benchmark—that is, a meaningful degree of positive improvement at Time 2. We may flag this group for further interpretation, but, strictly speaking, we cannot attribute their relatively high performance to the intervention. However, identifying the size of this group may inform how programs target their efforts going forward.

Second, it is possible that some participants may see *negative* change: their performance declines between Time 1 and Time 2. Clearly, they should be counted in the percentage not making progress; but, again, it may be important to flag these participants for further analysis to understand what might have accounted for this pattern, which may include measurement error or other circumstances.

A *third* group of participants is likely to be classified as showing no meaningful change. Again, a more detailed analysis of this group may yield information useful in refining practices around recruitment, retention, and program content/delivery.

We can apply an IMDE approach to other indicators, in addition to the one concerning school readiness, as long as we have measurement data that meet certain requirements with regard to sample size, variability, and completeness. Additionally, we could use this approach to follow a cohort of participants over multiple time points (beyond the Time 1 and Time 2 points described here), or to track more than one cohort (for example, participants who enter a program at successive time points).

Aligning participant data across multiple programs, each using different measures, is inherently challenging. Communicating the results of that alignment is an additional challenge. We think this approach addresses these challenges in a way that is responsive to the diverse needs of this initiative's various stakeholders, while maintaining a priority focus on the common outcomes that express their shared commitment.

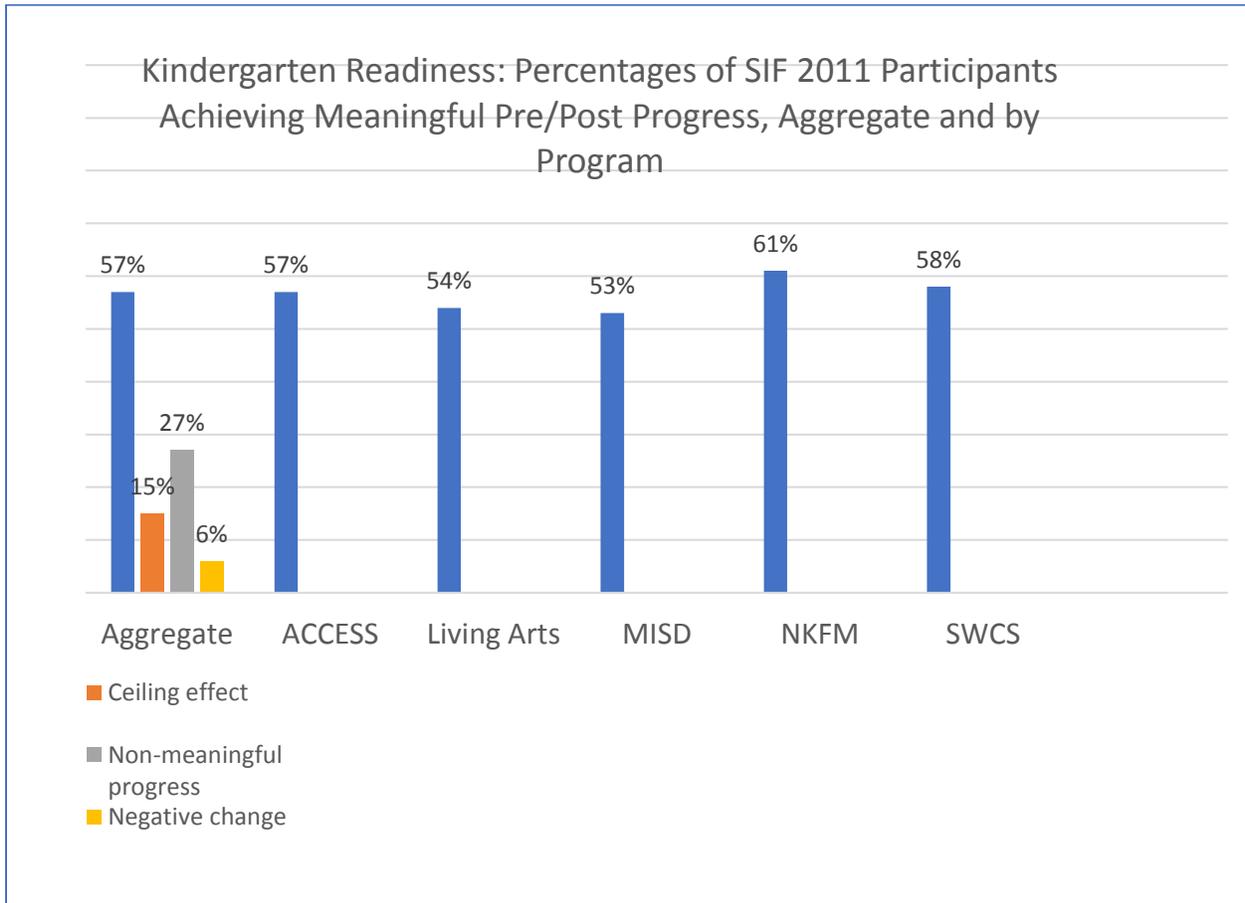
Results of IMDE Analyses

In addition to the two indicators under the Children Are Ready to Learn outcome, we could apply the IMDE methodology to an analysis of progress on Outcome 2—Parents and Caregivers Nurture Children's Development. However, we lacked sufficient data to extend the analysis to the indicator level. We did not have sufficient data to address the third outcome, Communities Promote Children's Well-Being.

Indicator 1a: Percentage of children who are ready for kindergarten

Across the six subgrantees, 57 percent of participating children made significant progress on the kindergarten readiness indicator, as measured by their program's instruments.

Figure 1



	ACCESS	Living Arts	MC	NKFM	SWCS
Measure(s)	<i>Bracken School Readiness Assessment</i>	<i>COR, Approaches to Learning COR, Social and Emotional Development</i>	<i>ASQ</i>	<i>Hours physically active, Child Behavior Check List, Healthy Eating Habits</i>	<i>ASQ</i>
Average effect-size	.265	.133	.511	N/A	.201

By subgrantee, the proportion of children making a significant degree of progress toward kindergarten readiness, as measured by the difference between pre- and post-intervention scores, varied between 53 percent and 61 percent.^g

Of the group not making significant progress, 15 percent (N=71) were children whose scores at baseline^h exceeded the threshold for meaningful IMDE analysis. Another 6 percent of children (N=28) scored lower at follow-up than at baseline.ⁱ The balance of children (79 percent; N=372) did not make statistically significant improvement.

Indicator 1b: Percentage of children who are developing typically across multiple domains

At this writing, there are sufficient data to report on four developmental domains: language/communication, literacy, social-emotional, and health.^j Figure 2 shows the percentage of children, across programs, who achieved meaningful progress on each readiness domain, as well as the specific instruments relied upon for data collection for each domain. A majority (53–60%) of children made progress in each developmental domain.

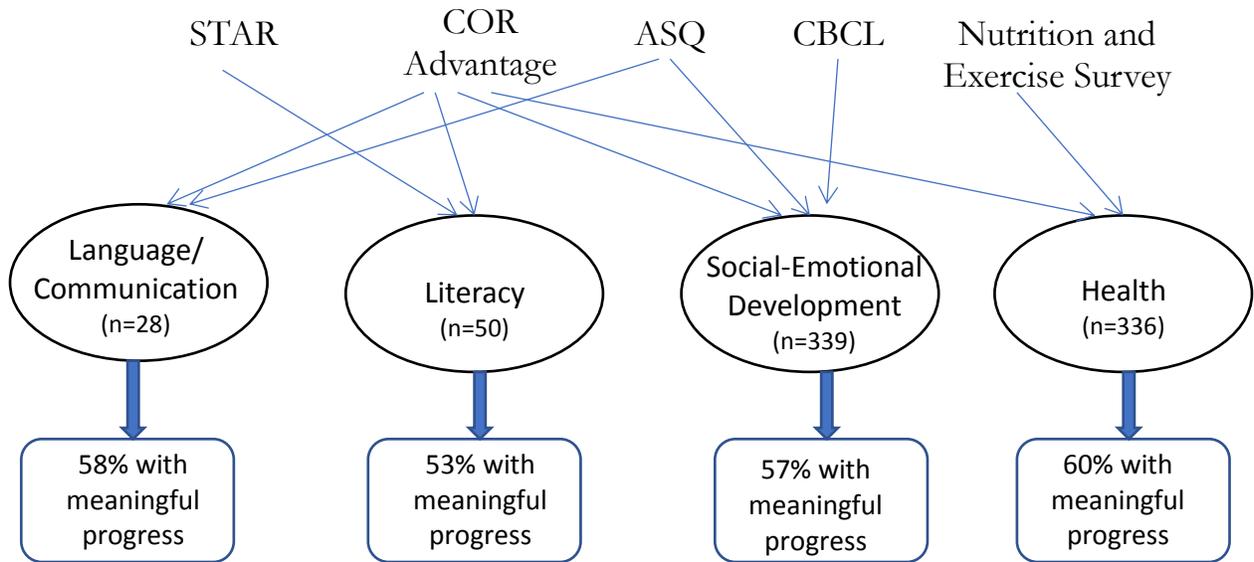
^g By program, these data reflect intervention group samples ranging in size from 16 to 529. The aggregate data used in this analysis reflect a total of 1,071 participants.

^h In the case of one program, Living Arts, comparison group scores, not baseline scores, provided the contrast to the intervention group.

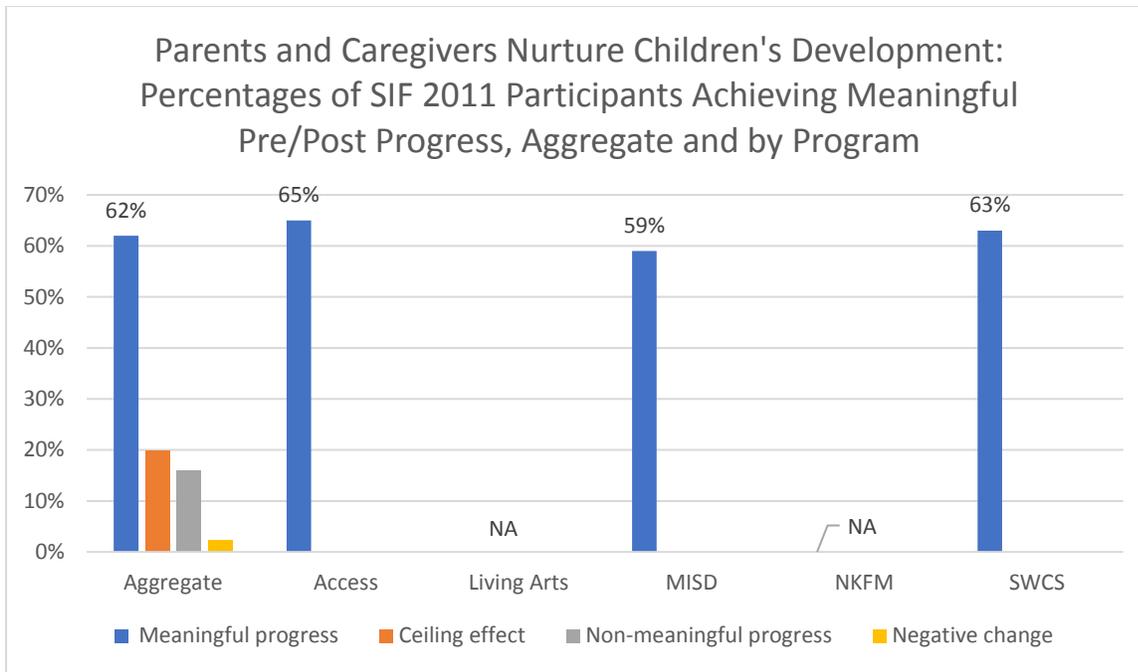
ⁱ All negative changes were nonsignificant and could reflect sampling characteristics, such as regression to the mean.

^j Language and cognitive development are often considered a single domain; however, for this analysis we had data relevant to the language component only. “Literacy” includes emergent literacy skills, such as letter recognition, letter sounds, and vocabulary; “Language/communications” includes skills with receptive and expressive language.

Figure 2: Percentages of SIF Participants Achieving Progress on Selected Readiness Domains, and Associated Instruments



For the second outcome, *Parents and Caregivers Nurture Children’s Development*, data appropriate to the IMDE analysis were available for three programs only. However, in aggregate, nearly two-thirds of participants (62 percent) made meaningful progress on one or measures of this outcome.



	ACCESS	Living Arts	MC	NKFM	SWCS
Measure(s)	Time spent reading with child, <i>About Being a Parent</i> scale, <i>Parental Stress Index</i>	N/A	Understanding of Child Development (n=166), Regular reading to child, HOME	N/A	Daily reading to child, <i>BEST</i>
Average effect-size	.174	N/A	.331	N/A	.201

SIF outcomes in context

To make a fair assessment of the outcomes achieved under the SIF initiative (collectively and by subgrantee), we examined the results achieved by similar types of interventions. The parent- and child-level outcomes obtained by the 2011 SIF initiative—more than half of participants making meaningful progress and effect-sizes ranging from 0.17 to 0.51—compare quite favorably.

For example, in a review of multiple rigorous evaluation studies of early childhood education programs—including Perry Preschool, Abecedarian, and National Head Start—researchers found an average effect-size for cognitive and achievement scores of 0.35. When estimates were weighted to reflect sample sizes, the average effect-size was reduced to 0.21.⁴²

The Head Start Impact Study found relatively modest effect-sizes associated with the program's impact on child outcomes. For language and literacy measures at age 4, effect-sizes ranged from 0.09 to 0.22. There were no significant effects on math achievement or on school performance measures. In general, stronger effect sizes were found for the age-three cohort: 0.1 to 0.26 for language and literacy, and 0.15 for math.⁴³

A study of five child-parent centers used the Teaching Strategies Gold instrument to assess intervention children in the spring before kindergarten entry. Children were considered kindergarten-ready if they performed at or above national norms on five of the six domains (literacy, language, mathematics, cognitive development, socio-emotional well-being, physical health). Post-intervention, 58.8 percent of children were considered ready. Percentages ready, by domain, were 72, 64, 78, 80, 77, and 58, respectively.⁴⁴

Within a contribution perspective, we can bring together results from both the IMDE analysis and the independent outcomes evaluation conducted separately for each subgrantee.

Comparing program-level findings from the independent evaluations with findings from the COCI analysis

To obtain a more complete picture, we examined results from the third-party independent evaluation of outcomes from each subgrantee, together with the subgrantee contributions to the COCI analysis.

ACCESS: Children in the intervention group showed greater progress than those in the comparison group on the letters, numbers, and shapes subscales of the Bracken. These gains may be reflected in the small (but meaningful) effect-size associated with ACCESS in the COCI analysis for *Children Are Ready for Kindergarten*. Parents in the intervention group showed improvements in frequency of reading to their child, attitudes toward their role as the child’s teacher, and decreased parenting stress; their perceptions of the child’s social competence improved. These measures of parental growth can be associated with the contribution of ACCESS (a small but meaningful effect-size) to Outcome 2 (*Parents and Caregivers Nurture Children’s Development*) in the portfolio analysis.

Living Arts: The intervention group children made greater progress (as indicated by a medium effect-size) than comparison group children on all subscales of the COR (except for social studies), and on the total score. In terms of the portfolio outcomes analysis, Living Arts’ contribution to *Children Are Ready for Kindergarten* was relatively small as measured by effect-size; however, a majority of participants (54 percent) experienced meaningful progress. Living Arts did not have a role in Outcome 2 (*Parents and*

Caregivers Nurture Children's Development) because its emphasis was on affecting teachers and young children.

MC: Parent knowledge of early child development, their endorsement of the value of reading daily to children, and their knowledge of how to access community resources improved among the intervention group. Nearly all intervention parents showed improvement on one or more subscales of the home learning environment and more than four in five improved on one or more protective factor, or had fewer concerns about the child's behavior. MC's parent-focused efforts may be reflected in the effect-size associated with the Outcome 2 (*Parents and Caregivers Nurture Children's Development*) portfolio analysis.

NKFM: Small, positive effect-sizes for Regie's Reading Adventure participants were obtained for fruit servings, vegetable servings, and a composite of the two. Hours of television watching and hours playing video games were reduced, and hours of physical activity were increased, for the intervention group. However, for purposes of the portfolio analysis, an average effect-size could not be calculated because the available data did not meet the analysis requirements.

SWCS: Relative to the comparison group, children in the intervention group had better school attendance and greater gains on items indicating an academic mindset (self-initiation, task completion, asking pertinent questions, appropriate help-seeking from the teacher and from peers). Intervention children made greater gains in reading proficiency. Among parents, the intervention group made greater progress on learning English. All parents of intervention children reported helping with homework, reading aloud, and reading with their children at least three times a week.

Intervention parents used the results of developmental screenings to respond to their child's areas of delay. A majority provided children with books, writing materials, and a quiet, organized space to study in their home. Parents expressed optimism for their children's futures, including expectations for post-secondary education. Within the portfolio analysis, these results are paralleled by effect sizes that indicate small (but meaningful) progress on both Outcome 1 and Outcome 2.

Summing Up, and Next Steps

Multi-partner interventions present numerous challenges to business-as-usual—not least of which are those related to evaluation. To quantify partner contributions to shared goals, while accounting for diversity of program models, service populations, and measures, has long been a Gordian knot that has perplexed the field.

Child Trends was able to apply a common yardstick (IMDE) to aggregate results across programs that varied greatly in their participant characteristics, intervention activities, and assessment instruments. In doing so, we can report on outcomes at an initiative level—an accomplishment vital for attracting and sustaining commitment to collective approaches to achieving impact.

Results of the IMDE analyses provide evidence that a majority of young children participating in SIF subgrantees' programs made meaningful progress toward being ready to learn. In addition, their progress was observed across multiple domains of readiness. In short, we can say that partners moved the dial on their high-level goal.

There are limitations to this approach. Most importantly, these data cannot be used to draw inferences of cause and effect—in particular, to attribute children’s progress to specific program activities. Many factors influence children’s development. Second, effective sample size (the number of children or parents for whom there were complete assessment data) varied widely by program. Having larger samples for analysis would strengthen confidence in these results. It is an ongoing challenge for many community-based programs to collect high-quality data on their participants, especially over time, since many serve populations facing numerous obstacles (transportation, language barriers, and the many stresses associated with urban poverty) that interfere with consistent attendance.

Each program is conducting rigorous, independent evaluations as part of the SIF initiative. These evaluations will ultimately determine the specific contributions made by their activities to the outcomes and indicators examined here, and to other results for children, families, and caregivers participating in their programs.

Appendix A: Calculating Individual Minimum Detectable Effect (IMDE)

This is a two-step process:

1. Calculate the critical t-value

t=

$$t = \frac{\frac{\sum(x_{\text{post}} - x_{\text{pre}})}{N}}{\sqrt{\frac{\sum(x_{\text{post}} - x_{\text{pre}})^2 - \frac{(\sum(x_{\text{post}} - x_{\text{pre}}))^2}{N}}{N(N-1)}}}$$

Then, the IMDE, or $d_z = t/\sqrt{n} = .29$

2. Create a new variable for each participant

Reading Difference = (Reading Score post - Reading Score pre)

Recode difference-score variable into a new dichotomous variable

Reading Difference \geq IMDE = 1 (Meaningful Improvement)

Reading Difference $<$ IMDE = 0 (Else)

Appendix B: Measures

For measuring the kindergarten readiness indicator, the SIF subgrantees used the following instruments:

ACCESS:

Outcome I: *Bracken School Readiness Assessment, 3rd Edition*.⁴⁵ This is used to assess concept acquisition and literacy skills. Five subsets assess basic concepts such as colors, letters, numbers/counting, size/comparison, and shapes. This assessment is administered to children at the program's pre- and post-intervention time points. The *School Competence & Behavior Evaluation (SCBE-30)*⁴⁶ is also used. Outcome II: The *About Being a Parent Scale*⁴⁷ measures parents' beliefs about their ability to influence their child's education, compared with other factors. The *Parenting Stress Index*⁴⁸ measures stress related to caregiving.

Living Arts:

Outcome 1:
Child Observation Record (COR).⁴⁹ The COR is a 32-item observation-based instrument. It assesses eight major categories that are critical for school success: Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Physical Development and Health; Language, Literacy, and Communication; Mathematics; Creative Arts; Science and Technology; and Social Studies. There is also a category for English Language Learning, if appropriate for the child. The COR is administered three times per school year to both intervention and comparison classrooms.

Macomb Collaborative:

Outcome I: *Ages & Stages Questionnaires, 3rd Edition (ASQ-3)*.⁵⁰ The ASQ is a series of parent-completed questionnaires to help screen infants and young children for developmental delays during their first 5.5 years. The ASQ is administered prior to the start of home visiting, and when home visiting has ended. There are 30 developmental items that focus on the assessment of five key areas: Communication, Gross Motor, Fine Motor, Problem Solving, and Personal-Social.

Outcome II: Parents' understanding of child development was assessed through two retrospective pre/post surveys, one for Play & Learn groups, and one for PAT home-visit groups. The Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) Inventory⁵¹ measures the quality and extent of stimulation available to a child in the home environment.

NKFM:

Outcome 1:

Child Behavior Checklist for Ages 1.5 to 5.⁵² This provides a score of the child's externalizing behavior as reported by the teacher or parent. Additionally, the program uses a self-designed *Nutrition and Exercise Survey*. These surveys are administered at parent events at the program's pre- and post-intervention time points.

SWCS:

Outcome 1:

Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening-PreK (PALS-PreK).⁵³ This is a phonological awareness and literacy-screening tool that measures preschoolers' developing knowledge of important literacy fundamentals. Additionally, the program uses the ASQ. To measure

children's mastery of literacy concepts, the program uses the *STAR Early Literacy* assessment.⁵⁴

Outcome 2:

The *Basic Essential Skills Test* (BEST)⁵⁵ is a measure of adult English language proficiency.

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